

Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 36:5-10
1 Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

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If you've ever been to Cana, you know the first thing you see when the bus rolls into town is a huge sign that says "Fill the jars with water. Cana wedding wine for sale." Apparently, Jesus turned so much water into wine that we can still buy it all these years later! Though there might have been a mix up because I'm pretty sure what I purchased was what the steward referred to as the "inferior" wine.

The wedding at Cana is the first of the signs Jesus makes in John's gospel, which is very different from Matthew, Mark or Luke. In John's gospel, Jesus is always in charge, never at the mercy of the Roman occupiers, the scribes or the pharisees, and seemingly more divine than human. In Matthew, Mark & Luke, Jesus' first public act was to line up with a bunch of sinners, get dunked in the muddy, murky River Jordan with them, and receive John's baptism of repentance. And while it seems altogether different in John's gospel, in some way, the same thing happens. Jesus goes to a small-town wedding and takes his place in the midst of the people as a wedding guest. Yes, there was a miracle. Yes, he turned copious amounts of water into wine. But what we also need to notice is that what Jesus did in Cana is in some way much like what he did in the Jordan. At the inauguration of his ministry, no matter who tells the story, Jesus took his place right smack in the middle of God's people and showed himself to be one of us. Yes, I know he made a miracle turning water into wine. But don't miss the fact that Jesus did just exactly what any polite guest at a first century Palestinian wedding or a dinner party today would do – he brought blessings and he brought really, really good wine.

I know this might not seem like the most important part of the story, and I know there are so many things to explain. Like the fact that Mary being referred to as the Mother of Jesus doesn't sound very loving. But for a first century Palestinian woman to be referred to as the Mother of anyone, provided the anyone was male, was to confer a title of honor.

Or perhaps Jesus sounded rude to you when he called his mother "Woman" instead of mom. But Jesus calling his mother "Woman" was also polite and honorable. Mary appears only twice in John's gospel, here, and at the foot of the cross. Do you remember what Jesus said to her there? Speaking of the beloved disciple, Jesus said "Woman, here is your son." It's the way polite people talked in the first century Mediterranean world. It also helps us to see Jesus not

just as Mary's son but as the Son of God, who would turn the notion of family on its head. *Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.*¹

Or maybe you want to know why Jesus used the Jewish purification ritual jugs to make water into wine. It wasn't just because they held 20 or 30 gallons, it was part of what scholars call Messianic replacement and abundance². It's not that Jesus came to replace Judaism – I believe Jesus always thought of himself as a faithful Jew who came to fulfill the law³. But Jesus did and said some very important things in the context of some very important Jewish places and festivals, all of them showing him to be the long-awaited Messiah and author of the new commandment. For example, on the last day, the great day of the Festival of Booths just when the priest was concluding the elaborate ritual of pouring water from the pool of Siloam over the altar, *Jesus stood and cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."*⁴ The priest had just poured out the water, praying to the Creator God to provide water for the people, and Jesus answered that prayer⁵ saying he, himself, was living water. And when Jesus made the first of his signs in Cana, he replaced water from Jewish purification rituals with an abundance of exquisite wine. That replacement was yet another sign that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah who was sent by the Father, and now the only way to the Father.

There are so many important parts to this story, yet what speaks most strongly to me is that Jesus went to a small-town wedding, thought it was a bad time to reveal who he really was, changed his mind and turned what could have been an absolute disaster, into an occasion of blessing and the greatest abundance imaginable.

Wedding feasts in Jesus' time went on for days and days. Everyone in the community was invited and everyone in the community helped to make the celebration happen. While the bride and groom were the hosts, they counted on the guests to bring gifts of wine and food to keep the festivities going on, and that is exactly what happened – at least that's usually what happened. When the wine ran out at this wedding feast, it seems only the stewards and the servants, and of course Jesus' mother, knew. It's important not to miss that, for a couple of reasons. Like the lowly shepherds being the first to learn that the Savior had been born in Bethlehem, only the lowly servants got to see this miracle, the first of Jesus' signs. That's our reminder of the paradoxical nature of the Kingdom of God – the first shall be last, the last shall be first, and God is for everyone. But there is something more, something we don't necessarily notice because we're not first century Palestinians. You see, if anyone, let alone everyone had known the wine had run out, if the celebration had ended too soon because there wasn't enough, people would have seen that as the community's condemnation of the marriage, because the community

¹ Mark 3:35

² Brown, Raymond. *The Gospel According to John 1-12*. The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 1966. P 104-105

³ Matthew 5:17

⁴ John 7:37-38

⁵ <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v06-n07/sukkot-a-promise-of-living-water/> accessed 1/15/22

hadn't provided enough to properly host the feast. Yes, the wedding family had some measure of the hosting responsibility, but in the first century Mediterranean world, that didn't mean they provided everything. The community's wholehearted participation was its blessing and this young couple just beginning their new life together would have been shamed beyond imagining if the food or the wine had run out. It would have been seen as a curse on their life together and they might well have been shunned by the community. So, while the miracle of Jesus turning water in to wine is pretty awesome, what matters so much more to me is that Jesus offered a life of unspeakable blessing to this blissful newly married couple rather than allow them to be condemned to a life of shame. Yes, his first response to his mother when she pointed out the absence of wine was "my hour has not yet come," but for reasons we can't know, he changed his mind. His mother never doubted that would happen – she just told the servants to do whatever he told them to. And when Jesus changed his mind, the rules, the plans, even the timing of the revelation of his divinity all dropped away. Jesus didn't say "I don't want to do this now, I'm not ready to begin the miraculous signs, stop telling me what to do, Mom." He said, "My hour has not yet come." In John's gospel that "hour" refers to his passion, death and resurrection, the time when God's glory would all be revealed. But Jesus let that go and made his first miraculous sign, blessing an unnamed newlywed couple from a little town in Galilee with a life of abundance and grace.

The same thing is true for us, you know. We have plans and we know what we're doing and when we're doing it. We have all sorts of ideas about how it's all going to go. And it used to be that we could go on believing not just that we could know how things would go, but that we could actually control things. But this story about a wedding in Cana shows us what happened when set aside his plans for his perfectly timed revelation. And in John's gospel, that's really saying something. Jesus did something he could do to offer blessing and a real future for the bride and groom whose wedding he'd been invited to. It wasn't what he'd planned – and for a minute there, it seemed he'd do nothing. But instead, he made water turn to gorgeous wine and made a new beginning possible for the wedding couple and their families.

While we can't control a pandemic or bad politics, most all the time there really is something we can do to bless what is right in front of us, to make a pathway to a future that is sweet and loving and filled with possibility. Sometimes, we need to lay aside our plans, maybe even lay aside our hopes and dreams to make a place for God's infinitely more expansive hopes and dreams. That's what it is to be co-creators with God, to be the kingdom builders and kingdom bringers. We only need to open our minds and our hearts, to be filled with gratitude for our blessings, and then to go and be a blessing in God's beloved, beautiful and broken world. Amen